

By CHARLES E. FRILEY and ROBERT W. ORR

## A Decade of Book Storage at Iowa State College

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TEN YEARS AGO the Iowa State College Library began storing the overflow from its central book stack in a storage building constructed for this purpose. In view of the widespread interest being shown in individual as well as in cooperative book storage facilities of various types, this account of how one library has sought to solve its storage problem may be of interest to other libraries in need of supplementary stack space.

It should be understood that the library storage building at Iowa State is for storage purposes only. It was constructed for, and has been used solely by, the Iowa State College Library to meet an emergency situation. No claims are made that a similar solution to the book storage problems of any other institution could necessarily be as satisfactorily solved in a like manner. Moreover, no claim is made that the solution is the best possible one for Iowa State for all phases of its storage problem; it is not. Most, but not all, of the publications in storage belong in the central book stack to which place they should be returned as soon as a new wing to the library building is erected.

When the library building was completed in 1925, there was a sharp division of opinion on the campus as to how long the book stack, with a working capacity of only 180,000 volumes, would be adequate. Professional librarians contended that the expected rate of growth of the book collections

would be such that the book stack would suffice for not more than five years. Others, however, held that the obvious emptiness of the book stack (there were only 90,000 volumes to place in the stack then) could only mean that there would be ample shelf room for years to come. As it turned out, the librarians were the more accurate in their opinion; the library was obliged to begin storing books in outside locations in 1930!

The next 10 years constituted a period of trying expediency during which time the overflow from the central book stack was shelved first in one campus building and then another. The situation finally became so critical that the administration made funds available with which to build an inexpensive supplementary storage building as a means of consolidating the stored materials in a single fireproof structure assigned to the library for this purpose.

The storage building, located one-tenth of a mile from the library, was completed in time for occupancy in September 1940. Its outside dimensions are 96' x 56'. The two levels of the book stack are of conventional steel stack design and have a total working capacity of about 190,000 volumes. The stack levels have end aisles in the center only. The carrels, six in number, fit into the stack sections in place of shelves.

The building, previously described,<sup>1</sup> is of industrial design, Series A, Type 1, of the Truscon Steel Company, with columns and trusses, panel sidewalls, roof deck, doors and

<sup>1</sup> Orr, Robert W., and Thompson, Lawrence S. "The Library Storage Building." *Library Journal*, 67:150-3, Feb 15, 1942.

sash of the out-projected ventilator type, all made of steel. The materials were delivered in prefabricated form ready to be bolted into place.

Heat is furnished by eight unit blower-type steam heaters thermostatically controlled. In summer air is circulated in the building by means of two electric exhaust-type fans located near the peak at each end of the building. Artificial illumination is obtained from unshaded aisle lights. The walls, but not the roof, are lined with insulating board.

The cost of the building, including the steel book stack, was \$27,418.07. It was estimated that the cost per cubic foot was approximately 25.5¢ and that the cost per volume, on the basis of full capacity, was about 13.2¢. It is estimated that the cost of erecting a similar building today would be in the neighborhood of \$60,000.

Spatially and functionally the building has served very well indeed. The fact that its working capacity has nearly been reached is no reflection on the building or on its planning. Under normal circumstances, a new wing to the library would have been available by now. The building has met the objectives for which it was constructed, namely, to furnish a single fireproof structure under the control of the library in which all materials in outside storage could be housed.

The major defects of the building, the only ones which will be mentioned here, are related to the present lack of means of controlling the temperature, humidity and purity of the air. In the first place, the steel roof deck is inadequately insulated; the temperatures range from extremes of as high as 120 degrees in the summer to subfreezing levels in the winter. The lack of adequate insulation renders the heaters costly to operate. As a result they are used only during periods when shelvers or other per-

sons are working in the building. The moisture in the air ranges from 90-plus relative humidity to less than 10. Because there is insufficient insulation around the windows and doors to render them dust tight when closed, the material in storage is subjected to the injurious effects of a heavy infiltration of abrasive cinder dust and other foreign particles from a nearby roadway, which greatly hasten the rate of deterioration of paper and bindings alike.

The heating and humidity problems of the storage building are capable of satisfactory improvement. A more favorable range of temperatures can be obtained by insulating the steel roof deck. By insulating the doors and windows and by closing a cindered roadway near the building, the situation, with respect to the infiltration of impurities in the air, would show marked improvement.

At first the selection of material to be shelved in the building was an easy matter. The initial volumes to go were those already stored in outside locations. They included a partial serial set; the reserve stock of bulletins, monographs and journals used in the centralized college exchange program which is administered by the library; and early runs of comparatively little-used general as well as scientific and technical journals. To this group were added additional files of journals from the central book stack.

Later, the residue of the book collections which were still classified according to the Dewey decimal system were transferred en bloc. This group of material included books only, all journals having long since been reclassified according to the Library of Congress system. In order to store still more books without having to make separate charges for them, a scheme was developed whereby the work mark "XS" was put above the call numbers of older books and

of a few of those new titles which were expected to be in demand only occasionally. The category of materials under the "XS" work mark has now grown to a collection of about 10,000 volumes, whereas those still under the Dewey decimal system number approximately 9000 volumes.

The selection of additional runs of journals in recent years, however, has presented a much more difficult problem. It has seemed that no matter which volumes were sent to storage, objections, sometimes registered in a vehement manner, were invariably forthcoming from faculty members. Furthermore, an increasing number of requests for volumes in storage began to complicate and impair service to readers at the loan desk. As time passed, however, the library and readers learned to live with, if not to like, this situation which instead of showing improvement became progressively worse as more and more materials were sent to storage. In fact, for several years the library has been storing actively-used scientific and technical journals, taking, in some instances, all volumes except those for the past three to five years.

At present no publication is sent to storage until it has been screened by the heads of the Circulation and Reference Departments and the director. Even after this extraordinary precaution has been taken, the choices are not always happy ones for the simple reason that too high a percentage of the book collections, now nearly 40 per cent, is shelved in the storage building. It is not unusual for the library to return a set to the central book stack before it has been in storage a month in order to meet unanticipated requests at the loan desk in a more satisfactory manner. In fact, the situation has become so critical that when a new book is received by the library, either it must now be stored or a book in the stacks removed to make room for it there.

The situation at Iowa State with respect to the storage of parts of the book collections is not necessarily identical with that of other large college and university libraries. In the first place, the book collections do not include a significant amount of either cataloged or uncataloged materials of marginal value, such as excessive numbers of duplicates, gift collections of dubious utility, back files of little-used newspapers, unneeded files of state and foreign documents and the like. For the most part, the book collections comprise a relatively small, but rigidly selected, group of materials in the basic and applied sciences with heavy emphasis on complete sets of scientific and technical periodicals in the subject fields stressed by the Graduate College.

Twenty-five years ago an unusually foresighted acquisitions policy was adopted which wisely precluded the future purchase, or acceptance by gift or exchange, of materials of any sort which did not fit directly into the active needs of the college programs dealing with instruction of resident students, research or extension education. The indiscriminate and large-scale acquisitions of materials by some libraries have been avoided at Iowa State due to the observance of its acquisitions policy. One reason for the success of this policy, of course, is the relatively limited number of subject fields emphasized by the Graduate College and the resulting remarkably clear-cut book needs of the library.

The library, like many others, places heavy emphasis on efficient service to readers rendered as speedily as possible. Consequently, it is not surprising that there has been some dissatisfaction on the part of readers over the fact that it takes considerably longer to obtain books from storage than it does from the central book stack. Routine requests received during the forenoon for books in storage are filled that af-



ternoon, while those made in the afternoon are not filled until the next morning. In emergencies, however, items can be obtained for readers within 10 or 15 minutes from the time the requests are submitted at the loan desk. These times of delivery are to be contrasted with the much faster time of approximately three minutes achieved on requests for material from the central book stack.<sup>2</sup>

Readers have not been limited in any way in the number of requests they have made for materials in storage. During the academic year 1949-50, an average of 24 books per day were returned from storage for readers and library staff members.

In a book storage situation, an important consideration is the matter of possible cost to the reader in obtaining items from storage or the cost to the library, provided no direct charge is made to the reader. Inasmuch as the library storage building is relatively near the library, it has not been necessary to make a charge to borrowers for obtaining material in storage. The only expense to the library for this service has been the wages of a student messenger and the upkeep on a delivery-type bicycle. Compared with the rates in effect for parcel post and express shipments, the cost to the library in obtaining materials from the library storage building has been negligible.

The question has often been asked whether it would be desirable, if it were possible, to return all of the material in storage to the central book stack. Members of the library staff feel that because of practical considerations it would not be desirable to do this, and furthermore, that the storage building should continue to serve as a supplementary storage area for the library for two reasons: (1) enough reserve shelf

capacity in the central book stack probably will never be available to permit return of all stored materials and still provide a reasonable amount of room for the growth of the collections, and (2) some of the stored material, while needed on the campus, can just as well remain in the relatively low-cost housing provided by the storage building. When viewed realistically, at least a part of any library's active collections can be shelved in relatively low-cost book storage facilities without unduly impairing service. It is desirable, of course, that the storage facilities be located as near as possible to the central library.

Both readers and members of the library staff have liked being able to go to the storage building when necessary without incurring transportation expense or having to spend any appreciable amount of time in reaching it. Although no direct loans of materials are made at the storage building, faculty members are encouraged to go there when they wish to consult a large number of volumes. Moreover, members of the reference staff have found it to be a definite advantage on occasion to be able quickly and inexpensively to consult publications in storage.

So far, this discussion has largely centered around the past and present problems and functions of the library storage building. What of the future? In just what way is the storage building expected to fit into the plans of the library since it is expected that some parts of the book collections will remain in storage after an addition to the central book stack has been constructed?

The character of the publications held in storage and their suitability as storage material should be considered. The majority of the items in storage are valuable scientific and technical journals which are in active use. Certainly, they should not be kept

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<sup>2</sup> The average time for delivery of books at the loan desk was 3.03 minutes as determined by a time study reported in *The Library At Iowa State*, Vol.3, No.7, Mar. 17, 1949.

of library organization. It is not common practice in departments of instruction and research to make promotion to the rank of associate or full professor contingent upon assignment to the departmental chairmanship. In fact, the majority of full professors in a university are assigned no regular administrative responsibilities beyond the usual amount of participation in the work of committees. It is generally considered desirable to free the professor of higher rank from as much of the chore of administration as possible.

The same freedom from purely administrative work may in some instances be highly desirable among members of the library staff and, for precisely the same reason, to enable the staff member to devote his energies to the educational functions of the library at a high level of performance. It does seem to be unnecessarily restrictive to say to a professional librarian, in effect, that unless he succeeds in being appointed to one of the very few top administrative posts in

the library, and otherwise, despite his achievement of advanced degrees and any continuing contribution of high order he may make to the educational program, he will be restricted in promotional possibility to the rank, salary and privileges of an instructor or an assistant professor. To look at it otherwise is to assume that the library is primarily an administrative organization rather than an educational institution and that real educational responsibility can develop only in the higher administrative posts. This is an absurd assumption and in some instances may be quite the opposite from actual fact. It is, of course, easier to administer promotions in a system where the pattern is laid out rigidly in terms of the administrative hierarchy, but so doing tends to avoid an important point at issue, the identification of the librarians with the teaching and research personnel.

*(Part II of this article will appear in a later issue of College and Research Libraries.—Editor)*

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in storage any longer than necessary. In the judgment of the library staff, these journals should be returned to the central book stack as soon as possible rather than be kept in storage on or off campus.

The other materials, such as the single book titles, including those classified according to the Dewey decimal system and those with the work mark "XS" above the call number, can be held in storage indefinitely without appreciably impairing service at the loan desk. The latter category will grow as the book collections increase in number and as the appearance of new editions and new works makes it possible to store books now in active use. The early runs of general periodicals, the reserve

stock of materials for the exchange program and a partial serial set, while needed on the campus, can just as well be shelved in the low-cost type of housing represented by the library storage building.

If all of the book collections at Iowa State cannot be housed in the central book stack, and this inclusion seems to be unnecessary from the standpoint of service, the next best location for them is in a supplementary storage building on the campus. Since this plan is also an economical solution, there is small likelihood that any plans will be made in the foreseeable future for the library to solve its book storage problem in any other way, whether on an emergency or on a long-range basis.